



A description of  
foundation skills  
interventions for  
struggling middle-  
grade readers  
in four urban  
Northeast and  
Islands Region  
school districts



Summary



Institute of Education Sciences

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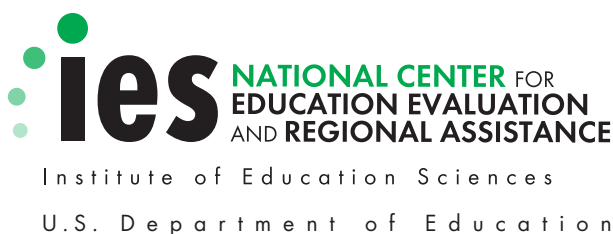
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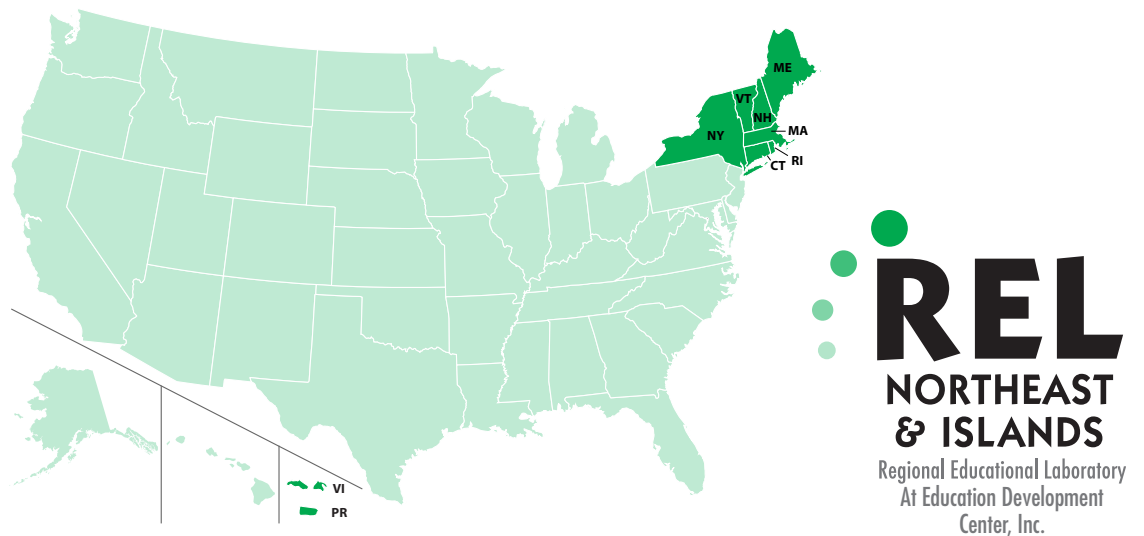
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# A description of foundation skills interventions for struggling middle-grade readers in four urban Northeast and Islands Region school districts

**This study describes how four midsize urban school districts in the Northeast and Islands Region were providing foundation skills assessments and programs to struggling middle-grade readers. Researchers found variations, but also some similarities, in the districts' use of tests and programs.**

This study, conducted during the 2006/07 academic year, describes how four midsize urban school districts in the Northeast and Islands Region—Worcester, Massachusetts; Nashua, New Hampshire; Yonkers, New York; and Providence, Rhode Island—were conducting foundation skills assessments and providing foundation skills programs to struggling middle-grade readers. The information presented here can help state and local education agency decisionmakers plan, implement, and evaluate their own foundation skills testing and intervention programs.

Foundation skills are reading skills that students typically develop in the primary grades. For middle-grade students the lack of these skills can lead to serious reading difficulties (Snow, Burns, & Griffin, 1998). Struggling readers can include students with learning disabilities, English language learners, and others

with diverse reading needs who are at risk for failure.

Four research questions informed the study.

- What screening and diagnostic assessments were districts administering to their struggling readers to determine their strengths and needs in foundation skills?
- What intervention programs were districts using to build foundation skills in their struggling readers?
- After enrolling students in intervention programs, what further assessments were districts using to monitor their progress in building foundation skills?
- What factors can promote or hinder a district's efforts to implement effective programs?

For each of the four participating districts, researchers gathered five types of information. They reviewed online articles, books, and journals for general information about assessments and interventions. They collected online district statistics. They read public documents describing literacy programs in the district.

They consulted state literacy plans. Finally, in each district they interviewed four district administrators chosen to represent four areas—special education, English language arts, Title I, and bilingual education.

From the information gathered from the four participating school districts, the researchers concluded that all four districts were in the beginning stages of testing and programming. The tests and programs varied, as did the numbers of students that the districts included.

For initial student screening all four districts were using standards-based state tests. To further diagnose middle-grade students' difficulties with foundation skills, all four districts were using four tests—Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), Scholastic Reading Inventory, the Woodcock Reading Mastery Test, and the Woodcock-Johnson III Diagnostic Reading Battery—although many published tests were available. Three districts were also using two other tests. For other diagnostic purposes the districts were using various other tests.

Many reading interventions are available. The four districts were using just eight interventions, however, with two being used in all four districts: Read 180 and the Wilson Reading Program. In addition, all four districts consistently described professional development as an intervention.

Three of the four districts—Worcester, Providence, and Nashua—were offering or planning

to offer their reading intervention programs within a three-tier approach, which provides a framework for teaching at different levels throughout a school to meet student needs (as determined through testing). Such an approach is consistent with the goals of the Response to Intervention method for identifying and serving students who have learning disabilities or who might need special help beyond that offered in the general curriculum and for determining which students qualify for special education.

To monitor progress, all four districts were using their state assessments and comparing scores across years. In addition, all four were using informal measures, such as program-embedded assessments and teacher observation. Two districts—Worcester and Providence—were monitoring progress at key points during the school year.

The study further identifies six factors that, according to the district representatives interviewed, can promote or hinder program implementation: building on the federal Reading First initiative by expanding selected aspects of the program to upper elementary and middle grades, using Response to Intervention and three-tier reading models, fostering collaboration among relevant departments and programs, recruiting highly qualified teachers in relevant areas, solving problems of time and scheduling, and ensuring that programs are carried out as designed.

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